STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Criteria for Submitting Specimens for Influenza PCR Testing to the

State of Connecticut Department of Public Health Laboratory (10/20/11)

UPDATE:
To ensure that influenza virus types, subtypes, and strains circulating in Connecticut are quickly identified, the Department of Public Health (DPH) has established criteria for submitting specimens for influenza testing by the DPH Laboratory. These criteria have been developed for the 2011-12 influenza season, which officially began on Sunday, October 2, 2011. They will remain until further notice.

Hospitalized patients and health care workers with influenza-like illness (ILI*) remain the priority groups for testing. The DPH Laboratory will also accept specimens for flu testing from patients with ILI if needed to control a facility outbreak and *approved by the DPH Epidemiology and Emerging Infections Program (EEIP) at 860-509-7994 prior to submitting specimens to the DPH Laboratory.* The DPH may update these criteria as the influenza season progresses.

* Definition of influenza-like illness (ILI): Fever >37.8°C (100°F) plus cough or sore throat

The sensitivity of rapid influenza diagnostic tests (RIDTs) and direct immunofluorescence assays (DFAs) are lower than real-time reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (rRT-PCR) tests and viral culture (http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/diagnosis/clinician_guidance_ridt.htm). A negative RIDT or DFA result does not rule out influenza virus infection. Further, these tests cannot distinguish between influenza A subtypes, such as the 2009 H1N1 or H3N2 influenza A viruses.

When submitting specimens to the DPH Laboratory for rRT-PCR influenza testing, it is important that the entire top portion of the Microbiology Testing Services form (OL-9B) is completed. In addition, the reason for testing (e.g. patient is hospitalized with ILI) and available rapid flu test results, must be written in the "Comments" section. If any of this information is missing, specimens will NOT be tested. Specimens from asymptomatic patients will not be tested.

Please note that the previously instituted, federal guidelines for specimen shipping remain in effect; specimens must be transported on ice or with ice packs. For submitters that meet the testing criteria, please call the DPH Virology Laboratory at 860-509-8553 if you have questions regarding DPH influenza testing. See viral reference collection kit (VR-C) specimen collection instructions on the following page.

Other Important Information:

- **Specimens must be accompanied by a *completed* Microbiology Testing Services form (OL-9B).** These forms are included in the DPH Laboratory VR-C kits or available on the DPH website at: http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/laboratory/labhome/pdf/ol-9b_form_4.10.pdf

- Test results will be provided to the healthcare provider ordering the test and the local health director where the patient resides.

- Healthcare providers are required to report cases of influenza-associated hospitalizations or deaths, institutional outbreaks, and unusual disease or illness (see the DPH website at: http://www.ct.gov/dph/cwp/view.asp?a=3115&q=390100&dphNav_GID=1601 for additional instructions and reportable disease forms).

These criteria are subject to change based on the evolving nature of the influenza season.

Diagnostic Laboratory Testing for Patients with Suspected Influenza Infection

- Collect one nasopharyngeal swab using a Dacron swab in viral transport medium for submission to the Department of Public Health (DPH) Laboratory, 10 Clinton St., Hartford, CT 06106.
- To request respiratory viral reference collection (VR-C) kits or for questions regarding the collection, handling, and transport of specimens please call the DPH Laboratory at 860-509-8553. Collection instructions are provided below.
- Diagnostic laboratory work on clinical samples from patients who are suspected cases of influenza should be conducted in a BSL2 laboratory. All sample manipulations should be done inside a biosafety cabinet (BSC).

VR-C Kit Collection Instructions

1. Remove all contents of the kit:
   a. Microbiology Testing Services form (OL-9B)
   b. M4-RT viral transport tube
   c. Dacron sampling swab
   d. Diagnostic Specimen mailer (sealable plastic bag, inner aluminum tube, outer fiberboard tube with the DPH Laboratory mailing address)
   e. A copy of these instructions
2. Completely fill out the Microbiology Testing Services form (OL-9B)
3. Label the M4-RT with patient name, facility ID, source of specimen (nasopharyngeal, throat, etc.)
4. Obtain an appropriate respiratory specimen from patient using the Dacron swab.
5. Remove screw cap top from M4-RT viral transport tube.
6. Insert swab into the M4-RT vessel until swab touches the bottom. Break or cut off excess swab handle.
7. Discard excess swab handle.
8. Tightly screw the cap on top of M4-RT viral transport tube.
9. Reassemble the VR-C kit prior to shipping:
   a. Place the M4-RT tube in the sealable plastic bag,
   b. Seal the top of the plastic bag and insert this package into the inner aluminum tube,
   c. Seal the inner aluminum tube using the matching screw cap,
   d. Place the Microbiology Testing Services form (OL-9B) around the sealed aluminum tube and insert these items into the outer fiberboard mailing tube.
10. Since clinical specimens must be shipped cold in appropriate packaging per federal guidelines, place the mailing tubes in an insulated cold transport box.
11. Seal the cold transport box for shipping, being certain that the DPH Laboratory address is present.
12. Deliver the sealed cold transport box via courier or mail the box after attaching appropriate postage.